

PARTS OF THE WHOLE

This activity encourages inside-out learning. Participants are invited to experiment with their own posture and then discover how changes in posture feel. Manipulating their posture into exaggerated positions lets them discover and appreciate the in-between positions. Hopefully they will compare these ideas with their own habits and become more aware of how posture affects them.

Benefits »

- ⦿ Helps participants feel their body's response to changes in posture.
- ⦿ Helps them monitor their posture.
- ⦿ Invites self-discovery for personal preferences.
- ⦿ Introduces neutral, in-between positions.
- ⦿ Builds social ties within the class.
- ⦿ It's fun to watch and listen as everyone tries new things.

Set It Up »

No props are needed, but practice helps. Knowing the options and their order, as well as the cues to use, will make this activity go more smoothly and productively. For the pelvic section it may help their visual perception if you are wearing pants with a belt for that class.

How to Do It »

This series of activities starts at the feet and ankles and works up, so begin with the participants standing. If your group is unable to stand, start with the head and neck and work down as far as the hip. They can shift their weight on their chair.

Feet and Ankles

For each change in foot position, ask how the change feels. Then ask which position feels best.

- ⦿ Have them place the feet a few inches apart and parallel.
 - Where do they feel their weight under their feet? Is it mostly under their heels? Their toes? Along the sides? A little of each?
 - Can they lean a little forward and feel their weight shift toward their toes?
 - Have them shift back again and see if they feel a more even distribution now.
 - Ask them to push out one hip and rest their hand on it. What pressure changes happen under their feet now?



- ◎ Duck feet: Ask participants to turn their feet outward, like a duck's feet.
 - What changes?
 - Does the duck stance strain the arches of feet?
 - Do they notice that the ankles roll in? Can they feel that?
 - Can they feel any changes on the inner side of their knees with duck's feet?



- ◎ Pigeon toes: Ask participants to stand pigeon-toed, turning their toes in.
 - What changes?
 - Can they feel any strains in the outer knee?
 - Go back to parallel feet, a few inches apart. Does that feel better?



- ◎ Ankle rolls: Ask participants to roll their ankles in and out. To roll in, lift the outside of the feet, and to roll out, lift the inside of the feet.
 - Do it again. Ask them to feel the changes.
 - What changes?
 - What hurts?
 - How are their knees affected?
 - Find a middle point, feet flat on floor.
 - Ask what's best for them.

Knees

For each change in knee position, ask how those changes feel and which positions they prefer.

- ⦿ Flexed knees: Get them to bend their knees and hold the position for a moment.
 - Do their legs tire quickly?
- ⦿ Soft knees: This is a slightly flexed standing position.
 - Does this feel better? Less tiring?
- ⦿ Locked knees: This is a hyperextended, or super-straight knee, position.
 - Does this cause their hips to tilt forward?
 - Does it change where they feel the weight under their feet?
 - Do they feel any changes in their back?



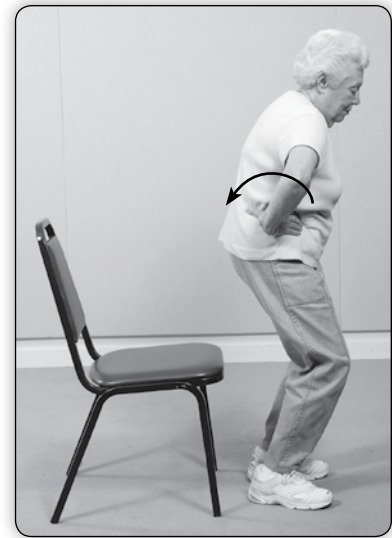
- ⦿ Which of these three options feels best to them?

Pelvis

The word *pelvis* comes from the Latin for “basin,” or a large bowl. A neutral spine or pelvic position can be found easily by rocking the pelvis. Imagine the pelvis is a basin filled with water. Tilt the pelvis forward and water spills out the front side. Tilt it backward and water pours from the back side. Hold it level and no water spills. This no-spill position is a neutral spine. If you’re wearing a belt, it clearly displays whether the hips tilt forward or back or are in neutral. In neutral position, the belt will be level.

While standing (or sitting tall on their chair), ask participants to place their hands on their hips, thumbs in back, fingers in front. Show and tell them how they can direct their hips into a forward tilt by pushing forward with their thumbs. If they were a basin, water would pour out the front side. They can tilt the pelvis backward by pushing back with their fingers. Their low back will round and water would spill out the back. After your demonstration, let them try. Their hips should be level to start, tilting neither forward nor backward and not listing to either side. For each change in the pelvis, ask participants to notice how the change feels and then which positions they prefer.

- ◎ Backward-tilting pelvis: Ask participants to tilt their pelvis backward, pushing their pelvis backward using their fingers. This motion rocks the pelvis backward. To some it feels like tucking their hips under their shoulders. If they were pouring water from their basin, water would pour out from the back.
 - What changes do they notice in their back and chest? (Cue them to notice that the back and shoulders round forward, chest muscles shorten, and chest flattens.)
 - What happens at their knees? Do they bend a little more? (Yes.)
 - Any other changes? (Head is lowered.)
 - Is their breathing restricted? (Slightly.)



- ◎ Forward-tilting pelvis: Now ask them to tilt their pelvis forward. To do this, they should push their pelvis forward with their thumbs. This will rock the pelvis forward. If they were pouring water from their basin, it would pour from the front. Ask them questions about how this feels:
 - Do they notice that their tailbones lift upward?
 - Can they feel a hollow develop in their low back?
 - Can they feel this especially in their low back?
 - Do they feel a slight stretch across their abdominal wall?
 - Which way do their shoulders move this time?
 - What else changes? Are there any changes to their knees? Do they hyperextend?
 - Do they notice how the changes are opposite to the backward tilting?

Ask them if they notice how their pelvis is a link between the upper and lower body. (This activity illustrates it well because the spine connects the two.)

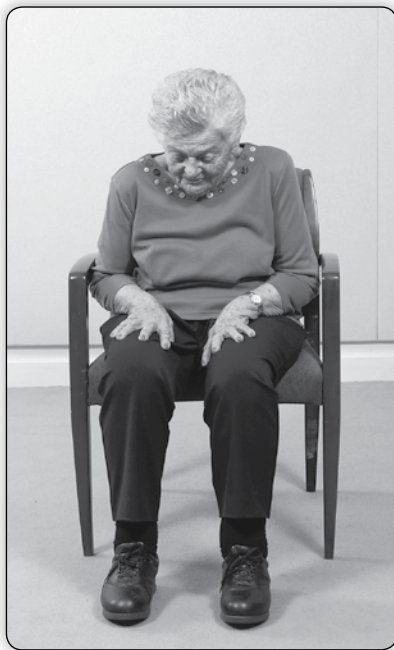
- ◎ Rock the Pelvis: Now participants will rock their hips back and forth. Ask participants to place one hand on their abdomen and one hand on the middle of their low back, just above their buttocks.
- ◎ In a simple rocking motion, have them pull the abdominals in and up with the front hand and push the hips down and under the torso with the back hand.
 - Do they feel how this rocks their pelvis under and in line with their shoulders?
- ◎ Do it a few more times for effect. Have them rock the pelvis backward and forward using their hands.
 - Allow time for them to find a comfortable in-between position that feels good and that keeps their pelvis centered under their shoulders.
 - This comfortable in-between position is neutral spine for their low back.

- ⊙ Once neutral feels good, have the participants secure the position with core stability.
 - Draw in the abdominal wall.
 - Lift the ribs to lengthen the spine.
 - Pull the shoulder blades back and down.
 - Breathe in; stand (or sit) tall!
 - Nice work. Good job. Ask them, how does that feel?

Shoulders and Midback

This section can be done seated. Your participants may be tired from standing.

- ⊙ Ask participants to draw their shoulders up toward their ears.
- ⊙ Have them push their shoulders down toward the floor. Repeat.
- ⊙ Have them find an in-between position for the shoulders that feels level.
- ⊙ Call it their level best. (Get it? Level is best!)



- ⊙ Have them roll their shoulders forward.
 - Have them try to take a breath in this position.
 - Can they feel that their breathing is restricted with the shoulders forward? (It is.)

- ⊙ Now, ask them to pull their shoulders back by pulling the shoulder blades together.
 - Have them take another breath. Was this breath much easier? (Much!)
 - Ask them if this chest-out position feels natural. (Probably not quite.)
- ⊙ Ask them to find an in-between position for their shoulders, somewhere between back and forward, up and down. The best position is when the shoulders point directly out to the sides.
- ⊙ Once they find the sweet spot for their shoulders, continue:
 - Lift the rib cage and spine into a tall sit.
 - Hold abdominals in and up a bit.
 - Bring shoulder blades back and down.
 - How does this feel for stable and tall?
 - This should feel great!



Head and Neck

Participants can be seated or standing. Begin with some background information about the head. Heads are heavy! They weigh 10 or more pounds (4.5 kilograms), balanced at the top of their structure. Any change in head position is hard work for the body to support.

- ⊙ Lift the chin and look up. How does that affect the chest and back? (Lifts chest and arcs back.)
- ⊙ Lower the chin and then drop the head. Can they feel these changes in their neck and back? (Do it again to compare kinesthetic learning.)
- ⊙ Hold the chin level, parallel to floor. How does that feel? Is it better in between?
- ⊙ Tilt the head right, then left. Discuss how that feels. Can they feel a stretch? Ask them if one side feels tighter than the other (it usually does).
- ⊙ Center the head. Is this another in-between position?
- ⊙ Can they notice the weight seems easier to support when the head is centered?
- ⊙ Head like an Egyptian or head on a silver platter (head retraction and protraction):
 - Beginning from a level chin, ask participants to use their neck and shoulder muscles to slide (retract) their head directly back. Their tendency will be to lift their chin, but we want them to keep the chin level, and slide the head directly back as if it were on a platter. At the end of this motion, the ears should be in line with their shoulders, or as close as possible.
 - Next have them jut the chin forward, in an Egyptian-looking head movement.
- ⊙ Ask which of these forward and back positions felt best.
- ⊙ Ask them to find an overall in-between position for their head. (That's neutral head position.)

Keep It Safe »

Nothing should hurt or make them uncomfortable. They can stop or refuse any suggestion. When participants are doing Parts of the Whole standing, provide balance support as needed.

Live It »

Improving posture is a compilation of many positions. Being aware of all the possibilities is the first step to making smart changes. Rocking the pelvis can help participants find their neutral spine. They should stand tall with the knees soft, feet parallel, and hips tucked under just a bit. Abdominals should be in, ribs lifted, shoulder blades back and down, and head lifted and retracted. Good posture takes an almost constant effort over a long time. It also takes desire, awareness, and lots of practice. Hopefully this activity will contribute to positive change.